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AUTHOR Record, Wilson  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper compares research interests of anthropologists and sociologists. The hypothesis is that similarities in the way in which anthropologists and sociologists define and gather data may produce convergences in style and methods of research, particularly in field work situations. Field work is interpreted to include practical and/or research work carried on away from the home university or research organization. Field work research topics which were, until recently, of interest almost exclusively to either sociologists or anthropologists but which are increasingly studied by researchers from both disciplines include ethnography, social change, social problems, pluralist groups in post-industrialist societies, social stratification, and socialization. In addition, many problems are common to researchers in both disciplines. These include the decline in funds available for sociological and anthropological research, the difficulty experienced by field workers from both disciplines in establishing rapport with sources, the tendency to produce value-laden observation due to bias against or over-identification with sources, and failure of professionals in both fields to employ, train, and promote women and minority group members as field researchers. The conclusion is that anthropologists and sociologists will improve their contributions to social science research if they continue to draw heavily upon each other's work, train newcomers in methodologies and literature of both disciplines, and encourage women and minority scholars to participate in field work projects. (DB)

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A NOTE ON SOME COMMON PROBLEMS IN CURRENT  
FIELD WORK IN SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY\*

by

WILSON RECORD  
PROFESSOR OF SOCIOLOGY AND  
BLACK STUDIES

PORTLAND STATE UNIVERSITY  
PORTLAND, OREGON, 97207

sp o/c 704  
ps

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Anthropologists and sociologists have drawn heavily on each other's work, establishing patterns of reciprocity that have improved the contributions of both. Parsons is not a stranger to anthropologists and no sociologist would admit being unacquainted with Levi-Strauss. Indeed, some of our colleagues so combine anthropology and sociology in their professional work that we find it difficult to attach a singular label. They in turn feel as much at home at a sociologist's gathering as at an anthropologist's conference.

Sociologists studying social change find essential the work of ethnographers which serves as base line against which current developments can be projected. Without the contributions of anthropologists, sociologists would be severely handicapped in their comparative studies of social structures and social institutions. On the other hand anthropologists have welcomed the efforts of sociologists to illumine the mechanics of the socialization process and to underscore the persistence of basic group behavior forms across both time and space. Recently anthropologists have ventured into the area of "social problems" which for a long time was populated almost exclusively by sociologists, largely by default.

In both fields one finds a heavy emphasis on the training of newcomers in methodologies deemed essential to empirical inquiry and the generation of new knowledge. Methods vary both between and within the disciplines. However, at certain points they converge. At others they can be utilized in tandem. Not infrequently a member of one discipline finds that he has more in common with a member of another than he has with a member of his own group. Here the tie that binds is likely to be a similar, if not fully shared, approach to the definition and gathering of relevant data. The common ground on which the sociologist and the anthropologist are most likely to meet is field work.

The recent convergences of interests of anthropologists and sociologists may produce convergences in styles and methods of work. If so, we may be able to handle better some of the problems of field work which become more numerous and more complex in an era of rapid social change on a world-wide basis. It is to some of these problems that I now turn. I will focus on several of them which I perceive as especially challenging at the present time.

The first of these is the decline in funds available for sociological and anthropological research. This development is familiar to all of us, as it is to members of other social science disciplines. Well-financed research is not always superior to that done with very limited funds. However, the chances are good that in the long-run the former will contribute more than the latter to the development of knowledge. Prospects for increasing research funding are not good. Indeed, much of our effort may be spent in holding actions, best exemplified in the all-out effort by the American Anthropological Association and other social science associations to forestall abolition of the anthropology program throughout the City University System of New York in 1977.

With respect to field work we should try to devise new approaches which will be less costly than those currently in use. More participant-observer inquiries coupled with the judicious use of data obtainable from secondary sources could save money without reducing the quality of investigation. As a corollary, we should persuade other agencies to gather data useful to us along with that essential to their particular purposes. Further, we might rely more on secondary analysis of previously gathered material having relevance to the issues we are exploring. These and similar measures would seem essential if we assume, as I think we should, that we no longer have

and are not likely to get the power to wring from public and private sources such bountiful grants we obtained a decade or two decades ago.

The second problem which we now confront is the lack of access to sources from which significant, indeed essential, data might be obtained. As groups in American society become more organized, they are in a better position to control what is known about them and their members. Increasingly sociologists are perceived by organizations as suspicious seekers of information. The primary motive of the investigator is frequently perceived as career enhancement, achieved at the expense of those studied. It is not surprising that in a number of black communities research review councils have been formed to authorize, sanction, monitor or veto local social science research; a good example is found in the Roxbury area in Boston. Denial of access is more likely if the groups have centralized structures and staff specialists whose job precisely is to deal with nosy sociologists and anthropologists. If the researcher is going to get more than PR handouts, he or she is going to have to establish genuine minimal rapport with sources. If the field worker is unable to do this, he or she should abandon the inquiry.

The multiplication of pluralist groups in post-industrial societies provide both opportunities and barriers to anthropological and sociological inquiries. An example of the latter is readily at hand. Many San Francisco Bay area anthropologists and sociologists were embarrassed that neither they nor their colleagues had launched studies of the Temple cult prior to the mass murders and suicides in Guyana. Those questioned by newspaper reporters offered only lame generalizations, the stock-in-trade of pop social scientist everywhere. However, their failure becomes more understandable if one considers the power of the Temple leaders over the members and the risks, including violence, run by outsiders attempting to study the cult and the

behavior it evoked.

One cannot help being impressed, in reviewing previous anthropological and sociological field studies, by the low status of the groups examined. Frequently they were naive, or weak, or powerless, or captive or, as in welfare "clients," dependent and coerced. The field worker was definitely in a superior position and, consciously or not, exerted pressures for the interviewee to respond in a prescribed form. In the circumstances the latter's defenses had to be silence or deception. Only trust would have produced the accurate information essential to the viability of the inquiry. It is my impression that anthropologists could teach sociologists a great deal about establishing trust relationships although I am persuaded that they rest more on what a person is rather than on the technical skills he or she has cultivated.

Here I pass over the critical issue of access to persons and to data associated with the growing "intelligence community." The dangers in gathering and secreting information which seems essential to the fulfillment of its mission are many and serious. However, I do not believe that outright condemnation or rigid refusal to participate is necessarily an appropriate posture for social scientists. I would like to believe that had our intelligence apparatus in Iran included a substantial number of cultural and social anthropologists with expertise in Mid-Eastern and Iranian cultures, the bloody upheavals of recent months might have been at least anticipated, perhaps even limited or avoided. The flood of post-mortems may support what is now only conjecture.

A third and closely related issue is field work among groups that are at the same or a higher social or professional level than the investigator. This is not a new issue, but the failure to deal with it very effectively limits our understanding of them. Certain demographic characteristics are likely to

be directly available or entered in public records. However, the inner-workings of their social relationships may be known only through the use of highly unobtrusive measures or the sustained playing of a well-conceived, participant-observer role. And here the risk is high that the role-playing will influence the shape and direction of social interaction.

In more specific contexts the difficulties appear in a clearer light. A sociologist interviewing a male psychologist concerning his view on women in the profession is likely to be perceived both as an outsider and as a threat, the first because he is not a member of the tribe, the second because he is prying into tribal secrets concerning the menial status of women in a presumed meritocratic collective. Yet, both the psychologist and the sociologist occupy roughly the same social and professional status positions.

However, an anthropologist questioning a physicist concerning the absence of blacks in the field may not be taken seriously. He is perceived as an inferior, as a non-scientist or pseudo-scientist. This disdain for social scientists is not the anthropologist's fault and there is little that he as an anthropologist can do about this widely shared conviction. In the specific instance the anthropologist's best bet is to become a Federal Affirmative Action Officer and cut off the physicist at the pockets unless the requested information is forthcoming. Of course, the prospects for dialogue across the physical and social science chasm would be improved if sociologists and anthropologists would actually do more scientific work, while reducing their proclamations about how scientific they really are. An alternative would be to follow the lead of anthropologists in the new polytechnic schools in Britain and place themselves in departments of social studies, a move which the late C. Wright Mills would most heartily approve.

The foregoing issues are broad developments that sociologists and anthropologists will have to accept as more or less given, only to small degree responsive to even the maximum pressures which the two disciplines might muster. The remaining obstacles reside within each field. Our dealing with them, however, should be informed by past experience. Unfortunately, that experience has not been a very happy one.

The next issue is one of long standing and continuous debate; it has to do with the development of value-free observation in field work. We know already that anthropologists, and to a lesser degree sociologists, tend to identify or over-identify with those groups they are studying, particularly if they immerse themselves in the culture or society for relatively long time periods. However, it is frequently the case that the researcher is already sympathetic with the group(s) chosen; that sympathy, indeed, may be the major factor in his or her choice. Further, the field worker is likely to feel that reciprocity is essential, that he or she must give as well as receive; that act carries the possibility of changing the group as the observation continues.

The major problem here, however, is bias acquired in both personal and professional socialization. Most anthropological and sociological field work by Americans has been and continues to be done by white males. They may emphasize their detachment and objectivity. However, as products of a society where sex and race discrimination is strongly emphasized, they cannot rid themselves readily, if at all, of the biases they have acquired. Hence, they have great difficulty in exploring the roles of women or of a racial minority in the unit chosen for study. They seek out male informants and depend heavily on them to define the roles of women and minorities. Thus, they cut themselves off from at least half the population which might be expected to perceive themselves somewhat differently than is reported by male informants.

Such biases call into question the recent as well as the older inquiries regarded as landmarks in the two disciplines.

This leads me to a related difficulty confronting field investigators. It has to do with the failure of anthropologists and sociologists to admit, train, employ and promote women. This development has deprived both disciplines of highly - talented personnel, reducing the volume as well as the overall quality of professional work.

One must note that recent remedial measures were not generated from within, that is by the white males who were allowed far-reaching autonomy on the assumption that they had professional expertise and would use it for the public good. The dominant white males consistently violated their own meritocratic norms, relying on irrelevant or erroneous gauges of professional potential and professional achievement.

The fact must be faced that the internal impetus for eliminating discrimination came from women, blacks, and other minorities who frequently couldn't gain a hearing until they adopted confrontational tactics. External pressures came from the legislatures, the judiciary and the administrative agencies of government. One response of the white males was patterned evasion of fair practices laws; another was ritualistic or token observation of the law which left the departmental, associational, and disciplinary structure pretty much the same.

The implications of intra-disciplinary discrimination for field work are many and cannot be readily measured. However, there is mounting evidence that women in anthropology and sociology, when supported, encouraged and trained as thoroughly as men, can do equally good field work, even better in certain situations where the exploration of sex roles and related traits is crucial. Further, women have made important contribution by expanding the

range of social science inquiry and pinpointing issues slighted or ignored in the past. Not unexpectedly, they are the source of new perspectives and paradigms in the exploration of traditional areas such as socialization, social stratification, and social change, to mention some of the more important ones. These intellectual contributions alone merit a book-length study of the sociology of social science knowledge.

For the above and other reasons we cannot help but be disturbed by what appears to be a slackening of government efforts to reduce discrimination in the social sciences and by the indecent haste with which many anthropology and sociology departments have reinstituted the status quo as external pressures are relaxed. An encouraging note, however, is the survival and growth of women's advocacy organizations in the social sciences, for example, the Sociologists for Women in Society, the Association for Women in Psychology, and the Conference for Women in Anthropology.

There is another development with which most of you gathered here will be familiar. This is the generally low status in which applied work and those who carry it out are held. Even though sociologists and anthropologists face demands that their work have relevance to public problems, and that they use professional knowledge in their solution, professional responses have been halting. This is more true of anthropologists and sociologists than it is of economists and psychologists.

These public demands seem neither unreasonable nor excessively invasive, particularly in view of the public support accorded both anthropology and sociology during the past two decades. Since "pure" research is descriptive and analytic and not public policy-oriented, most of it fails to produce data relevant for policy makers. Nor does it generate strategies for concrete application. Yet, it would seem that one of the best tests of theory or

methodology would lie in their application to specific human group behavior which is problematic and unresponsive to conventional treatment. The frequent disdain of theorists for policy issues and for applied work suggests that they are reluctant to subject abstract formulations to the test of day-to-day human realities.

Here I might mark the recent statement of a high officer of the American Sociological Association who said he feared the growing emphasis on applied work since it would slow the development of theory, as if the latter would be stunted by the rigorous testing it would receive in many human problem areas. Yet, the en vacuo pensees of theorists may well be a major source of our internal confusion and external denigration.

A related consideration is the probability that most sociologists and anthropologists by temperament and training are incapable of doing applied work or of suggesting to others how they might utilize research results. It is not surprising that we and our colleagues have only limited capability to orient or to train aspiring newcomers in the techniques and strategies of applied work. This produces a tendency to avoid those situations in which such blemishes might become salient.

Further, we should not misinterpret the recently expressed concern of leading figures in our professional associations to place newly-minted Ph.D.s in non-academic posts where at least some applied work would be mandatory. It is quite clear now that such efforts were spurred not by a reasoned recognition of the wider responsibilities of the disciplines but by a calamitous drop in demand in the academic market place and by a self-serving concern to maintain intact the elaborate machinery for producing more Ph.D. sociologists and anthropologists. As could be expected, recent Ph.Ds seek applied posts only when the options are driving taxis, waiting tables or

loading trucks.

In concluding, I wish to deal briefly with the question of the status applied-oriented scholars in the two disciplines. First, I think we have to recognize that such men and women do not command the highest prestige. There are both obvious and subtle ways in which negative regard is expressed. However, we should be encouraged by the growing number of applied anthropologists and sociologists who are receiving appropriate recognition and by a greater openness to and involvement in applied work.

At the same time, however, we have to resist both our personal ambiquities and external pressures which tempt us to abandon or limit applied endeavors. It is my impression that a number of problem-oriented social science journals over time shift their emphasis and style toward the more prestigious publications of which "abstract empiricism" is the characteristic mark and where small questions receive large attention while greater challenges to theory tend to be ignored. Neither Human Organization nor Social Problems will benefit from becoming more like The American Anthropologist or The American Sociological Review. One trusts that Practicing Sociology will fully retain its initial thrust.

Applied scholars may have been right all along. Recognition, however belated, is taking place among our colleagues. Imitation remains one of the most impressive forms of flattery, no less in anthropology and sociology than in other fields. And in the long run those engaged in applied work may provide better tests of theory as well as new ingredients essential to theoretical growth.